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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002521

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: THE TURKISH GENERAL STAFF: A FRACTIOUS AND SULLEN POLITICAL COALITION

REF: A. ANKARA 418

[B](#). ANKARA 1350

[C](#). ANKARA 2122

[D](#). ANKARA 2330

[E](#). ANKARA 1367

[F](#). 02 ANKARA 2914

(U) Classified by Ambassador W.R. Pearson. Reasons: 1.5 (b, d, X6).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As refs (A-E) note, Turkish General Staff (TGS) remains deeply involved in day-to-day political life and policymaking, with attendant strains and divisions among senior military leaders over domestic and foreign policy issues. These divisions are more visible today than at any time in the past, according to our contacts, and will cause additional friction and delays on cooperation on operational political and diplomatic issues of concern to the U.S. End summary.

[1](#)2. (S) Numerous long-time contacts across the political spectrum have recently shared their concerns at rivalries and unevenness in TGS decision-making and the detrimental effect these divisions are having on Turkey's willingness to work with the U.S. These contacts (strictly protect) include, but are not limited to: (1) former Turkish NSC staffer and executive director of the XXXXXXXXXXXX, who in his previous career in military intelligence spent significant time with now-ranking TGS general (8) the owner-CEO of a major media conglomerate; (9) XXXXXXXXXXXX, chairman of the XXXXXXXXXXXX, a leading Establishmentarian NGO; and (10) a former member of Parliament with excellent access to parliamentary, Kurdish nationalist, and Islamist circles. They consistently describe a TGS both riven by factionalism and projecting a heightened sense of suspicion toward the U.S. to degrees not previously seen.

Corporat(ist) Culture...

[1](#)3. (S) Our contacts remind us that there are, of course, certain institutional instincts which bind the TGS despite personal rivalries. These include: (1) an unwavering commitment to Kemalism (the worship of Atatürk and belief in the military's duty as the pre-eminent, intimidating guardians of the State, beyond civilian control); (2) a rigid corporate culture which does not tolerate individual initiative at lower ranks; (3) stiff adherence to "secularism" and fear of anything more than a cultural identification of Turkey as Islamic; (4) an inward-looking culture keenly protective of its ample subsidies, off-budget funds, large pensions and cushy sinecures (XXXXXXXXXXXX has given us concrete examples), and other privileges; (5) deep suspicion of Kurds; and the TGS's shared unwillingness to clean up:

-- procurement scandals (many contacts cite insistent stories of payoffs on the Israeli M-60 tank and F-4 fighter upgrade contracts; a senior expatriate rep for a major Western defense contractor also gave us details of a party for Turkish military officers, attended by numerous Russian call-girls and hosted by notorious pro-Russian businessman Ali Sen, the Turkey rep for Bell Helicopter rival Kamov and other Russian businesses, in August 2002 in the seaside resort of Bodrum);

-- conflicts of interest involving Turkish military properties in Northern Cyprus and links to drug smuggling in Turkey's Southeast; XXXXXXXXXXXX also recounted to us his unwilling involvement, while in military intelligence, in a deal organized within the Turkish military to sell medicine to the PKK.

[1](#)4. (S) The TGS also harshly resents any implication that it is not united in its views: in reaction to a "Washington Post" story which looked at rivalries among the TGS leadership, TGS Chief Ozkok on April 10 issued through State-run TRT criticism of the story as inappropriate particularly "at a time when the country is going through a very serious period due to developments in Iraq." Our contacts uniformly interpret Ozkok's statement as a general warning to Turks to avoid similar assessments. However, three leading journalists (Akif Beki, foreign policy columnist Murat Yetkin, and CNN-Türk foreign policy reporter Barcin Yinanç) subsequently separately told Embassy press officer that they admired the Post story -- all the more so since, in each one's opinion, no Turkish journalist would have dared to write it. In terms of military intimidation of journalists, both Lale Sariibrahimoglu of "Jane's Defence Weekly" and Cuneys Ulsever of "Hurriyet" have recently told us they fear for their lives as a result of their public criticism of the military.

...But Personal Rivalries

[1](#)5. (S) Despite this TGS profession of unanimity of views, there are now three main rival groups, according to our contacts. First, the "Atlanticists," who accept, whether enthusiastically or not, that Turkey's strategic interest lies in maintaining firm ties to the U.S. and NATO. Second, the rigid "Nationalists," who resent the need to maintain ties to the U.S., oppose Turkey's EU candidacy, prefer to trust no one (including the U.S., which they are convinced intends to support an independent Kurdish state carved out of Iraq), and insist on unbending maintenance of the Kemalist State. Third, "Eurasianists," who, without understanding the Russia-dominated nature of the "Eurasia" concept, have long

sought an alternative to the U.S. and are considering closer relations with Russia or some as-yet ill-defined grouping including Russia and Iran or Russia and China. Part of the motivating force is the "Rappallo Syndrome," the sense that Turkey and Russia are alone, equally victims of mistreatment and disrespect by an arrogant West (ref F). In addition, as XXXXXXXXXXXX has noted to us, another motivation for the livelier interest in Russia is the satisfaction among "Eurasia" advocates in the TGS that Russia shares the same preference for "stability" and will not press the Turkish State to continue to democratize. In the intramural TGS political contest, the "Eurasianists" and "Nationalists" are provisional allies.

16. (S) Our contacts see the main figures as follows:

-- TGS Chief Gen. Hilmi Ozkok is more democratically-oriented and more of an Atlanticist than any of his recent predecessors. A principled man who has upset people when he has stuck to those principles, Ozkok believes a democratically elected government needs to bear the responsibility for political decisions. He is, however, largely isolated, with few if any real allies among the top brass. In a bid to avoid confrontation with his more strong-willed and hard-line associates, Ozkok fails to assert his own views: one contact acknowledged that Ozkok exhibits a "Hamlet-like" uncertainty. Examples of this were Ozkok's failures: (1) to overcome TGS delaying tactics against U.S. operational plans; and (2) to force TGS colleagues to inform the government of the military's own planning or the logic of U.S. strategy and plans in the crucial run-up to parliament's March 1 (failed) vote on the U.S. and Turkish troop deployment motion. Ozkok did seek permission to go public asking that Turkey support the U.S. prior to the vote and was directed not to by President Sezer. Only when the press, in uncharacteristic fashion, began to criticize him afterward did he make a public statement that the TGS supported the U.S. request. Ultimately, however, Ozkok backing for the U.S. northern option was five days late and \$6 billion short.

-- Ozkok is opposed by a coterie of senior Army generals from the rigid-nationalist and Eurasianist camps, including most notably: (1) Deputy TGS Chief Gen. Yasar Buyukanit; (2) Gen. Aytac Yalman, the Land Forces Commander, the position from which future TGS Chiefs are usually elevated, though Yalman is likely to be retired; (3) First Army Commander Gen. Cetin Dogan; (4) Second Army Commander Gen. Fevzi Turkeri, who, according to XXXXXXXXXXXX, has long used the nationalist socialist weekly "Aydinlik" to leak scurrilous, anti-American stories (e.g., accusations that the U.S. materially supports PKK/KADEK); (5) General Tuncer Kilinc, the secretary-general of the powerful NSC and an outspoken advocate of stronger Turkish ties to Russia and Iran (ref F); (6) Gen. Sener Eryugur, Commander of the Jandarma -- an arm, the sources note, to which the TGS routinely resorts for investigative and "policing" purposes. We have also heard that J-3 Lt. Gen. Koksak Karabay, touted as a possible future TGS Chief, is associated with this group. Ozkok's most ardent and liberal supporters (typified by the J-5 Air Force Lt. Gen. Resat Turgut) tend to be less assertive than the Nationalists/Eurasianists.

-- The hard-liners are supported from the outside by influential retired senior officers including Gen. Doga Aktulga (who participated in the 1997 "post-modern" coup d'etat against the then Islamist-led government); Gen. Teoman Koman, at one time director of the national intelligence organization (MIT); and Ozkok's predecessor Huseyin Kivrikoglu.

-- The hard line is also carefully tended by the War Academy in Istanbul, the site for Kilinc's pro-Russia/Iran comments at the annual national security conference in March 2002 and for an extraordinarily bitter series of anti-U.S. comments by Kivrikoglu, Dogan and a dozen other senior Turkish officers in reaction against the presentation by the Dean of NDU's War College at the March 2003 conference.

The TGS and U.S. Interests

17. (S) The TGS's prolonged political opposition to the U.S. Iraq strategy, continued operational foot-dragging, and continuing accusations that the U.S. has an anti-Turkish agenda in Iraq have prompted more Turks to ask more questions about how committed the TGS is to relations with the U.S. In addition, with the generals coming under more public scrutiny, TGS contacts have begun to admit to us what many other contacts have concluded: that "some" in the senior leadership are more interested in undermining AK party and the Kurds than in preserving the strategic partnership with the U.S. (ref E).

18. (C) Given the current political environment, friction in the TGS will continue to compound the Turkish State's resentment toward the U.S. and reluctance to make helpful decisions on questions of central concern to us in the fluid period ahead. Moreover, strains between the top brass and more fiery elements lower down the chain of command could, as they have done repeatedly in the past (most recently in 1997), emerge as a political problem for the leadership. We have some evidence that Ozkok wants to bide his time on reestablishing solid cooperation with the U.S. until his opponents in the TGS retire. However, as so often in Turkey, biding one's time becomes an end in itself as outside events pass by at their own, swifter pace. Our contacts thus expect that any fundamental changes to the current military domination of the Turkish State system, as well as the regaining of dynamism in the U.S.-Turkish relationship, will require both the retirement of the hard-liners and, especially, the development of a new cadre of modern, forward-looking officers.

PEARSON